

Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

DCS Communications Office

October 29, 2004

The Week Ahead

Wednesday, Nov. 3

- Commissioner Miller will attend the Regional Administrators meeting in Nashville.

Staff Contact: Lane Simpson, lane.simpson@state.tn.us

- Commissioner Miller will also be meeting with Commissioner Betts of the Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities.

Staff Contact: Lane Simpson, lane.simpson@state.tn.us

- The Commissioner will be on vacation from November 5-14.

Regional Administrator Promotions

The following individuals have been promoted from interim to permanent Regional Administrators for their respective regions, effective immediately:

Sherri Hale, Northeast

Sandra Jordan, Upper Cumberland

Kirk Lane, East

Stacey White, Mid-Cumberland

Please congratulate them on their promotions and continued work in the support of children and families in Tennessee.

CORE Leadership

CORE Leadership Meeting
Ken Sanders, Presiding
October 19, 2004

- **Special Recognition**

Debra Valentine presented a certificate to Lana Beavers, Director of Internal Audit. Lana performed research on new directors entering the workplace and assuming the roles of former managers. From her findings, she developed a document titled Employee Issue/Inherited Employees, which identified some strategies and tips for managers and supervisors. Debra encouraged the CLT members to share this information with their supervisors and managers.

- **Internal Affairs Reporting**

The Commissioner asked for OIG to address delays in completing investigations. Steve Holmes discussed the Internal Affairs reporting process, stating that Code 1.16 says that anyone can request an investigation; IA then evaluates, classifies and prioritizes them. Holmes explained the two types of investigations:

A – Administrative Action – An example would be an NCIC criminal background check, intake calling-criminal act or complaint letters from other agencies.

Q – Investigative Inquiry – This is applicable in instances where it is unknown if any criminal act has occurred or if investigation is warranted. An inquiry's outcome could address management issues.

A full investigation is initiated when a known violation of DCS, state or criminal action has occurred.

Investigations are assigned to investigators on a rotating basis, as well as to staff with skills and expertise. The next step is the preparation of an authorization letter with specific instructions. IA has 30 days to complete an investigation inquiry when it has been assigned. A 15-day extension can be requested based on justification. Cases involving child safety and welfare are the first priority, as well as requests from the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner and Executive Directors. The Inspector General reviews the report, which goes through the proper chain of command, including Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner. The report is then routed to individuals making decisions on the particular case. For example, personnel would be routed to EEOC. Before the form is given to the Commissioner, the appropriate directors would need to provide recommendations. A smaller staff, consisting of Debra Valentine, Steve Holmes, William Haynes, Paul Montebello, Steve Hornsby, Michael Price, Judy Cole and Bonnie Hommrich, will look at improving the process flow of routing this report to the appropriate people and making shared decisions and recommendations. The group will present their recommendations in 2 to 3 weeks in Core Leadership.

Carla Aaron discussed the current status of SIU. She stated the SIU policies are in draft form, and she has talked with CPS staff and RAs individually on phone conferences to discuss suggestions for improvement and problem areas. Carla stated these meetings have been productive. Carla reported doing qualitative case reviews in Chattanooga two weeks ago, where she identified some training issues, but concluded that overall case records looked acceptable. A workload analysis is being conducted for a two-month period to show how staff spends their time. Carla reported improvement in the backlog cases, declining from 700 two months ago to 400 cases currently. She reported that she would begin using a tracking form on November 1 every week for case managers showing backlog cases. This tracking form will be used for communication between the case manager and supervisor to discuss strategies to address these cases.

Bonnie expressed concerns about patterns in investigations with private providers and how we follow up with them. Bonnie shared concerns about private providers conducting their own preliminary investigations of allegations of abuse and deciding what is sent to CPS. Mary Beth Franklyn, Randal Lea and Audrey Corder will

develop a committee to address agency pre-screening CPS referrals regarding allegations of abuse.

The Commissioner has directed regional staff to visit agencies and take a look to ensure children are being well placed. Debra will provide clarification on this issue during the RA conference call.

- **Project Prioritization**

Michael Price provided a handout on Systems Development and Enhancements and explained the six steps of developing methodology of systems development (Define, Analyze, Design, Develop, User Test and Implementation). Information Systems needs support and input from programs to obtain consensus. The release dates are January, May and September of 2005.

Michael stated that FHACP is at the top of the list and is the most important priority. The impact may change the date for phone-in of adoptive services and new board rates. He stated this wouldn't delay payment to any foster parents. The goal is to incorporate FHACP into TNKids in the May 2005 release.

Workplace Safety

Submitted by Jim Gordon, Director of Facilities and Support Services

Workplace safety is of primary importance to all staff in the Department of Children's Services. As an employer, DCS is responsible for complying with the Tennessee Occupation Safety and Health Administration as set forth in 29 CFR 1904 and 29 CFR 1910. Employees need to know what to do if they or their staff have occupational injury and/or illness. The department has a policy, DCS Policy #29.10, Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, and also DCS Occupational Safety and Health Program Plan. Both the policy and the program plan are accessible on the DCS Web site. In addition to our Web site, information is also available on www.osha.gov. These sites will provide the necessary information and forms necessary for reporting injury or illness. Also, DCS safety officer William (Brice) Poteete is responsible for making reports to the Department of Labor. Appendix II of our DCS Occupational Safety and Health Program Plan lists the contact person for each office within the department.

Departmental safety officer Brice Poteete can be contacted at 615-741-8426 or 615-306-0561.

Continuous Quality Improvement

CQI In Action

A visit to the Northeast Region's Annual Fall Fair brought more than good company and good food, although there was plenty of both! News also surfaced about an initiative in the region developed to address the problems of truant children and to strengthen their families by decreasing the need for these children to enter out-of-home care. Started more than a year ago, the initiative involves establishing truancy boards to stop the cycle of truancy before it

becomes a problem. The initiative, which started in Jefferson County, has taken root throughout the Northeast and is yielding positive results for children and families - thanks to the active and ongoing involvement of Northeast CSA Education Specialist Steve Dugger and DCS Education Consultant Jeff Finney.

How does the initiative work? When a child has had five unexcused absences, the school secretary notifies the Truancy Board, which puts the matter on the court docket and holds a Child and Family Team Meeting with the child and his/her parent(s) at the courthouse. Core members of a Truancy Board include at least one representative each of DCS, the court and the school. Other community partners, such as CSA, FSS and FCIP staff, law enforcement officials and mental health providers, may also be invited to join the Board.

How did the initiative get started?

In Hamblen County, judges who were concerned about the welfare of children who had high truancy rates were bringing more and more truant children into custody as a means of ensuring they went to school. While the intent was good, the cost of the method was high, and both the Hamblen County Court and DCS were looking for an alternative approach to the problem. One day, while DCS Education Consultant Ed Finney was holding a brainstorming session on the problem with CSA Education Specialists throughout the region, a case manager in Steve Dugger's area overheard his conversation and told him about the Truancy Board in Jefferson County. Steve went to Jefferson County and asked for information on its Truancy Board. They gave him everything he needed to start the initiative in Hamblen County. Steve, who has had court experience, went to work selling the idea to the court and the schools. He was successful and, as they say, the rest is history! The rate of entry for reasons of truancy dropped in Hamblen County and the initiative is spreading to other counties in the Northeast.

In many regions, DCS employees complain that they have no control over court decisions to bring children into care. While that may be true, this story shows how we can empower ourselves to make positive changes in the systems within which we work despite the constraints we may face. It just takes following the CQI process all the way through - brainstorming to share ideas on how to solve the problem, doing the research on the alternative solution(s) to the problem, developing the plan to solve the problem, selling the problem-solving idea, implementing the action steps, tracking the results and publicizing those results so that good ideas will spread and lessons learned can be shared for maximum benefit to all.

Congratulations to the Northeast Region DCS and CSA employees for working together to solve a problem and improve performance in ways that are keeping children and families together! Steve Dugger and Jeff Finney are both on Groupwise and would be happy to share their experience and their information.

CQI News

This has been a busy month for CQI at DCS. All 12 regions have held their initial CQI planning sessions, and all are at work developing plans for structuring local and regional CQI teams and implementing CQI processes.

The Upper Cumberland and Northeast Regions have already introduced CQI concepts to all levels of staff, as well as to community partners at their employee appreciation day activities.

Elaine Hong, CQI Coordinator for the Southeast Region, along with the Southeast Region's Regional Administrator and Team Coordinators did a tremendous job combining CQI training with their Employee Appreciation Day Celebration. As a result of this team effort, Elaine now has in hand action plans from each of the region's local teams for implementing at least one improvement strategy over the next quarter.

Following a joint-planning session for the Southeast and Hamilton Regions, Sherman Matthews, a Team Coordinator in the Hamilton Region, asked for CQI training for his cluster. A half-day training session, led by Semetta Pulley, was held for the cluster in late October and feedback from the group was enthusiastic.

With the CQI positions in the regions now approved, a face-to-face meeting in Nashville for CQI Coordinators will be held as soon as the positions have been filled to facilitate building a strong CQI network statewide and to move forward with the next steps in implementing CQI within the regions.

Remember, if you have any CQI news you'd like to share, please send an e-mail to Daryl Chansuthus. We'd love to celebrate your successes here as well as share your lessons learned. If there are particular members of your staff whose improvement efforts you would like recognize here, please let Daryl know.

Building Families – One Child at a Time

Submitted by Commissioner Viola P. Miller

A few weeks ago, I threw out the challenge to the regions for a massive adoption effort. November is National Adoption Awareness Month. We have hundreds of children already with TPR's and in pre-adoptive placements, who are just waiting for finalizations.

In their usual fashion, the regions responded with excellence. We have set a goal of 400 adoption finalizations between Nov. 1, 2004 and Christmas 2004. I cannot imagine a better way to end my first year as DCS Commissioner.

My dream is for adoption celebrations all over this great state. We're building families – one child at a time. This goal is possible only if we believe it's possible ... and I do. I believe in you and your commitment to our kids and to "for-ever" families.

You should know that I will do anything – provide any resources, support any effort – to make this happen. If you see barriers, knock them down. I will do whatever is necessary.

The regions have made a promise, and I will hold them to it. We will finalize 400 adoptions during November and December. Each of us – everyone – must support this initiative in order to make it happen. Every region that meets its goal will get a visit from a very happy Commissioner, with a "lard cake" in hand. The region that most exceeds their goals gets to choose from a very nice list of possible equipment enhancements.

“Building Families, One Child at a Time” is not a choice, it’s a mission. Success is our only alternative ... Failure is not an option.

I know the work is hard ... the road is long ... the task is arduous. But we’ve made a pledge, a commitment, and we can and will create 400 new families before Christmas!



Real integrity is doing the right thing, knowing that nobody’s going to know whether you did it or not.

- Oprah Winfrey

A community is like a ship; everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm.

- Henrik Isben

Children are the only form of immortality that we can be sure of.

- Peter Ustinov
